

# WILDFIRES AND WELLS

If your area has been affected by wildfires, your water well may have been damaged. This information sheet provides guidance to well owners who have concerns about fire related impacts to their water well system.

## Returning Home After a Wildfire

Returning home after a wildfire can be overwhelming and dangerous. We gathered some safety tips for re-entering a burned area:

- Avoid damaged or fallen power lines.
- Be careful of ash pits (depression filled with hot ashes) and burned trees. Serious burns or injury can occur.
- Wear protective gear before sifting through debris to avoid breathing in harmful dust or ash.
- Hazardous household materials like automotive fluids, paint, solvents, etc. should be disposed of properly to protect people and the environment.
- If you suspect electrical damage or gas leaks, do not try to use your electricity or anything with a flame. Instead, use a flashlight for your light source and report problems to your local utility. DO NOT stay in the home as there is risk of electrical shock or explosion.
- If sewage is visible, limit access to the area and contact your local health department for assistance.
- If you notice damage to your wellhead or well components above ground, do not turn on the water. Contact a licensed well contractor to assess and repair damages.

For more safety tips, refer to the resources listed at the bottom of this information sheet.

## Conditions at the Well

After a wildfire, underground well components like the pump may not be harmed. However, if your home and yard have been burned, it is necessary to complete a visual inspection of your well system and have any damage repaired before turning on the water.

Check the following for damage:

- Wellhead – casing, cap or seal, and any other above ground piping
- Tank – pressure or storage tanks (cisterns)
- Electrical – wires and control box
- Treatment – filters/housing, tanks, chemicals

Contact a licensed well contractor immediately for repairs. Shock chlorination or disinfection should be performed after repairs are made. Your well contractor will determine if this is required. It is important to note that shock chlorination/disinfection will not remove metals, pesticides, or other types of non-biological contamination. Do not drink or cook with the water until a water test is performed and confirms no harmful contaminants are in your water.

### **IMPORTANT!**

**DANGER OF ELECTRICAL SHOCK MAY OCCUR.**

**DO NOT** turn on the equipment until the wiring system has been checked by a qualified electrician, well or pump contractor.

## Water Treatment

Water treatment systems may also be damaged from the fire. Contact your water treatment professional to inspect and repair any treatment devices before use. If you need help locating a water treatment professional, the Water Quality Association provides a searchable database on their website at <https://wqa.org/find-members/>. Water testing should be performed once the treatment device is back in service. Use an alternative source, such as bottled water, for drinking and cooking until water testing proves the water is safe for all uses.

For information on how to treat water in an emergency situation when bottled water is unavailable, refer to our wellcare® information sheet, [Emergencies & Disasters and Wells](#).

## Water Testing

Once your well system and power have been restored, you may notice the water smells earthy, smoky, or burnt. You should flush your well system thoroughly and have your water tested before use.

Contamination concerns are from chemicals and microorganisms that can enter a damaged well. At a minimum, water testing should consist of ammonia, bacteria, nitrate, PFAS, sulfate, and turbidity. However, you may also consider testing for iron, metals (arsenic, copper, lead, mercury, zinc), pH, phosphorus, and salts (boron, chloride, sodium) as these contaminants are commonly found in well water following wildfire incidents.

Contact your local or state health department to have your water tested or to get a referral to a state certified laboratory that can perform water testing. If you need assistance, contact the wellcare® Hotline at 888-395-1033 or use our interactive map on our website at <https://wellcarehotline.org/well-water-testing-contractors/>.

For more information on testing your water, refer to our wellcare® information sheet [Well Water Testing](#).

## Septic System

Most of the functional parts of your septic system are below ground and are usually unharmed by fires. However, it is important to visually inspect your septic system for damage. Check for heat damage to any PVC piping above the ground, settling, or an inability to accept water. If you notice damage or your septic system is not functioning properly, discontinue use and contact your septic service provider for inspection and repair.

If you need assistance locating a professional, check with your local health department or search using these convenient resources: NOWRA <https://www.nowra.org/septic-locator/> and NAWT <https://www.nawt.org/search.html>.

## For More Information on Wildfires and Wells

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Wildfires.

<https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/wildfires/index.html>.

Colorado State University Extension. Addressing the Impacts of Wildfire on Water Resources.

<https://extension.colostate.edu/topic-areas/natural-resources/addressing-the-impacts-of-wildfire-on-water-resources-6-%20706/>

Environmental Protection Agency. Wildfires. <https://www.epa.gov/natural-disasters/wildfires>.

HealthLinkBC. Wildfire: Its Effects on Drinking Water Quality. <https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthlinkbc-files/wildfire-its-effects-drinking-water-quality>.

Minnesota Department of Health. Wildfire Can Damage Private Water Wells.

<https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/environment/water/wells/natural/wildfires.html>.

Tennessee Department of Health. Returning Home After a Wildfire.

[https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/health/documents/TDH\\_Return\\_Home\\_After\\_Fire\\_12\\_6\\_16.pdf](https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/health/documents/TDH_Return_Home_After_Fire_12_6_16.pdf)



## Information to help maintain and protect your water well system:

wellcare® is a program of the [Water Systems Council \(WSC\)](#). WSC is the only national organization solely focused on protecting the health and water supply of an estimated 23 million households nationwide who depend on private wells (according to the U.S. EPA).

This publication is one of more than 100 wellcare® information sheets available FREE at [www.watersystemscouncil.org](http://www.watersystemscouncil.org).

Well owners and others with questions about wells and well water can contact the wellcare® Hotline at 1-888-395-1033 or visit [www.wellcarehotline.org](http://www.wellcarehotline.org) to fill out a contact form or chat with us live!

## JOIN THE WELLCARE® WELL OWNERS NETWORK!

By joining the FREE wellcare® Well Owners Network, you will receive regular information on how to maintain your well and protect your well water.

Contact us at 1-888-395-1033 or visit [www.wellcarehotline.org](http://www.wellcarehotline.org) to join!